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DORA SIGERSON

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LOVE OF IRELAND

POEMS AND BALLADS

BY

DORA (SIGERSON)

(MRS. CLEMENT SHORTER)

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TO MY HUSBAND

THESE Poems are taken from *The Collected Poems* of DORA SIGERSON SHORTER, published in 1907, with an Introduction by GEORGE MEREDITH, and from subsequent volumes. A few are printed here for the first time.

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IRELAND

'Twas the dream of a God,
And the mould of His hand,
That you shook 'neath His stroke,
That you trembled and broke
To this beautiful land.

Here He loosed from His hold
A brown tumult of wings,
Till the wind of the sea
Bore the strange melody
Of an island that sings

He made you all fair,
You in purple and gold,
You in silver and green,
Till no eye that has seen
Without love can behold.

IRELAND

I have left you behind
In the path of the past,
With the white breath of flowers,
With the best of God's hours,
I have left you at last.

A BIRD FROM THE WEST

AT the grey dawn, amongst the falling leaves,
A little bird outside my window swung,
High on the topmost branch he trilled his song,
And 'Ireland! Ireland! Ireland!' ever
sung.

'Take me,' I cried, 'back to my island home;
Sweet bird, my soul shall ride between thy
wings';
For my lone spirit wide his pinions spread,
And 'Home' and 'Home' and 'Home' he
ever sings.

We lingered over Ulster stern and wild.
I called: 'Arise! doth none remember
me?'

One turned in the darkness murmuring,
'How loud upon the breakers sobs the sea!'

A BIRD FROM THE WEST

We rested over Connaught—whispering said :
‘ Awake, awake, and welcome ! I am here.’
One woke and shivered at the morning grey :
‘ The trees, I never heard them sigh so drear.’

We flew low over Munster. Soft I wept :
‘ You used to love me, love me once again !’
They spoke from out the shadows wondering :
‘ You’d think of tears, so bitter falls the
rain.’

Long over Leinster lingered we. ‘ Good-bye !
My best beloved, good-bye for evermore.’
Sleepless they tossed and whispered to the
dawn :
‘ So sad a wind was never heard before.’

Was it a dream I dreamt ? For yet there
swings
In the grey morn a bird upon the bough,
And ‘ Ireland ! Ireland ! Ireland !’ ever sings.
Oh ! fair the breaking day in Ireland now.

I HAVE BEEN TO HY-BRASAIL

I HAVE been to Hy-Brasail,
And the land of Youth have seen,
Much laughter have I heard there,
And birds amongst the green.

Many have I met there,
But no one ever old,
Yet I have left Hy-Brasail
Before my time was told.

Love have I known, too,
As I shall meet no more ;
Lost is the magic island,
And I cannot find the shore.

Since I have left Hy-Brasail,
Age has encompassed me,
She plucks me by the shoulder
And will not let me be.

I HAVE BEEN TO HY-BRASAIL

Her face is grey and mournful,
Her hand is hard and cold,
Yet I have left Hy-Brasail
Before my time was told.

MY PRETTY CHILD

Mo páistín deas, I did not know
How cold the winter's blast could blow,
Into her heart with what despair
Earth drew her bloom and blossom fair,
How lone a man might come and go
When you were here—how could I know?

How could I know, my little child?
When gracious summer looked and smiled,
Soft was the sleeping roses' breath
Who did not know or dream of death.
Like him who stood in glad surprise
At love discovered in your eyes,
That fleeting time so slow could pass
I did not know, *mo páistín deas*.

MY PRETTY CHILD

My pretty child, I did not know
How I had watched you come and go,
How I had listened for your song,
How short your shy caress, how long
Your absence was, till praying I
Looked up to heaven with a cry
'To call you back, there saw a star
And knew how far God's gardens are.

THE SEA HOUNDS

'THERE'S a hound at the door, Shawn
O'Farrell,
There's a hound at the door.
If you take down the bar or the shutter,
I shall see you no more,
I shall see you no more !'

'Oh, it is but the sea that is loosing
The white dogs of its spray.
Take your gentle young arms from about me,
For I must on my way.'

'But they whine at the window, O'Farrell,
How they sniff at the pane !'
'Oh, it is but the wind in its passing,
The wild wind and the rain.'

THE SEA HOUNDS

‘ How they keen in their waiting, O’Farrell,
So I hold you, afraid.’

‘ ’Tis some soul that ’s nigh lost in the tempest
Who so calls for my aid.’

‘ It ’s a witch of the waters, O’Farrell,
All sea-cold and wave-white,
With her hounds that will fawn till you follow
To your death in the night.’

He has opened the door, Shawn O’Farrell,
And gone forth to the dark ;
The wild hounds by his heel race and quarrel,
How they leap and they bark !

He has launched his frail boat on the waters—
He has pushed from the shore !
Pray, oh, pray for the soul of O’Farrell,
He shall come back no more.
‘ Shawn O’Farrell, O’Farrell, O’Farrell,
I shall see you no more ! ’

WHEN I SHALL RISE

WHEN I shall rise, and full of many fears,
Set forth upon my last long journey, lone,
And leave behind the circling earth to go
Amongst the countless stars to seek God's
 throne.

When in the vapourish blue I wander, lost,
Let some fair paradise reward my eyes—
Hill after hill, and green and sunny vale,
As I have known beneath the Irish skies.

So on the far horizon I shall see
No alien land but this I hold so dear—
Killiney's silver sands, and Wicklow hills,
Dawn on my frightened eyes as I draw near.

And if it be no evil prayer to breathe,
Oh, let no stranger saint or seraphim
Wait there to lead up to the judgment-seat,
My timid soul with weeping eyes and dim.

WHEN I SHALL RISE

But let them come, those dear and lovely
ghosts,
In all their human guise and lustihood,
To stand upon that shore and call me home,
Waving their joyful hands as once they stood—
As once they stood!

ALL SOULS' NIGHT

O MOTHER, mother, I swept the hearth, I set
his chair and the white board spread,
I prayed for his coming to our kind Lady when
Death's sad doors would let out the dead ;
A strange wind rattled the window-pane, and
down the lane a dog howled on.
I called his name and the candle flame burnt
dim, pressed a hand the door-latch upon.
Deelish ! Deelish ! my woe forever that I could
not sever coward flesh from fear.
I called his name and the pale Ghost came ;
but I was afraid to meet my dear.

O mother, mother, in tears I checked the sad
hours past of the year that 's o'er,
Till by God's grace I might see his face and
hear the sound of his voice once more ;
The chair I set from the cold and wet, he took
when he came from unknown skies

ALL SOULS' NIGHT

Of the Land of the Dead, on my bent brown
head I felt the reproach of his saddened
eyes ;

I closed my lids on my heart's desire, crouched
by the fire, my voice was dumb.

At my clean-swept hearth he had no mirth,
and at my table he broke no crumb.

Deelish ! Deelish ! my woe forever that I could
not sever coward flesh from fear.

His chair put aside when the young cock cried,
and I was afraid to meet my dear.

THE ONE FORGOTTEN

A SPIRIT speeding down on All Souls' Eve
From the wide gates of that mysterious shore
Where sleep the dead, sung softly and yet
sweet.

' So gay a wind was never heard before,'
The old man said, and listened by the fire ;
And, ' 'Tis the souls that pass us on their way,'
The young maids whispered, clinging side by
side,
So left their glowing nuts awhile to pray.

Still the pale spirit, singing through the night,
Came to this window, looking from the dark
Into the room ; then passing to the door,
Where crouched the whining dog, afraid to
bark,

THE ONE FORGOTTEN

Tapped gently without answer, pressed the
latch,
Pushed softly open, and then tapped once more.
The maidens cried, when seeking for the ring,
'How strange a wind is blowing on the door!'

And said the old man, crouching to the fire :
'Draw close your chairs, for colder falls the
night ;
Push fast the door, and pull the curtains to,
For it is dreary in the moon's pale light.'
And then his daughter's daughter with her
hand
Passed over salt and clay to touch the ring,
Said low, 'The old need fire, but ah ! the young
Have that within their heart to flame and
sting.'

And then the spirit, moving from her place,
Touched there a shoulder, whispered in each
ear,
Bent by the old man, nodding in his chair,
But no one heeded her, or seemed to hear.

THE ONE FORGOTTEN

Then crew the black cock, and so weeping sore
She went alone into the night again,
And said the greybeard, reaching for his glass,
'How sad a wind blows on the window-pane!'

And then from dreaming the long dreams of age
He woke, remembering, and let fall a tear:
'Alas! I have forgot—and have you gone?—
I set no chair to welcome you, my dear.'
And said the maidens, laughing in their play,
'How he goes groaning, wrinkled-faced and
hoar,
He is so old, and angry with his age—
Hush! hear the banshee sobbing past the
door.'

KATHLEEN NI-HOULIHAN

As I came down from the hill of Aileach,
When spring sang in the air,
I heard the silken voice of summer
Call from the cold earth there.

As I came down from the hill of Aileach,
I heard low laughter sweet.
There I came on a fair young maiden
Dancing on snow-pale feet.

Oh, white she was as the mist of morning,
All lovely in her glee.
Oh, glad she was as the mating thrushes
Trilling on greenwood tree.

' What hope can laugh through the long years
grieving,
What joy that cannot die,
What secret sings to your feet in dancing ? '
I cried as she passed by.

KATHLEEN NI-HOULIHAN

On her smiling mouth she laid her finger
And left me lone behind,
As she went up the dark hill of Aileach
Where the spring sang in the wind.

Oh, glad she was whom I once thought weary.
Young—and I thought youth gone.
As she went up the green hill of Aileach,
Kathleen ni-Houlihan.

PATRIOTISM

Is the tree living I once thought dead ?

Mo chraoibhin aoibhinn O,
It were a pity had its green life fled
So lovely are its branches in their spread,
And singing leaves telling of days long fled
When soft winds blow.

Have we forgotten how its life to save ?

Mo chraoibhin aoibhinn O,
Have ye forgotten, O young men and brave ?
Deep must the digging be as one long grave ;
And blood and sweat its tender roots must lave,
And salt tears flow,

That it may live, the tree I mourned as dead,

O little branch so frail,
By crowding brothers nigh its life was sped ;
But it shall raise once more its glorious head
So you may dream 'neath its exquisite shade,
O Grannia Wael.

DARK IS THE TOMB

DARK is the tomb, yet holdeth but one fear
In all its chill and silent majesty,
Lest I should lie divorced from all held dear
An exile yet—and ever still to be.
I never trod upon a foreign shore
But in my heart a flitting shade would rise
To whisper 'Haste, else thou return no more,
Who could not rest save under native skies.'

Nor do I look in envy on the stone
That tells, with all the luxury of art,
The fame of one who many virtues own,
Rich still in death he lies elect, apart.
By Dublin hills with purple heath aflame,
Where once I played glad 'neath soft Irish
 skies ;
By those proud tombs that bear a patriot's
 name
I could sleep well—near where O'Leary lies.

THE FLIGHT OF THE WILD GEESE

WRAPT in the darkness of the night,
Gathering in silence on the shore,
Wild geese flown from hiding on the hills
(Hark! the wolf-hound; thrice he howled
before),
Wild geese with forest leaves tangled in their
hair.
Is that blood on the heaving breast of some,
Or dull red clay from fox-deserted lair?
Why thus so stealthy do they come?
Wild geese, women's arms round you in the
darkness;
Women's hearts forbid to cry though they
break;
Little children must not sob in their kissing;
' Brother, forever? Oh hush thee, for God's
sake!'
Wild geese with fierce eyes, deathless hope in
your hearts,

THE FLIGHT OF THE WILD GEESE

Stretching your strong white wings eager for
your flight.

These women's eyes will watch your swift
returning.

(Thrice the banshee cried in the stormy night.)

Flinging the salt from their wings, and despair
from their hearts,

They arise on the breast of the storm with a
cry and are gone.

When will you come home, wild geese, with
your thousand strong?

(The wolf-dog loud in the silence of night howls
on.)

Nor the fierce wind can stay your return or
tumultuous sea,

Nor the freedom France gives to your feet on
her luxuriant shore.

No smiles for your love like the tears of your
sorrowing land,

Only death in his reaping could make you
return no more.

THE FLIGHT OF THE WILD GEESE

White birds, white birds, I dream of that glad
home-coming ;
Though human eyes could not mark your silent
flight,
Women lie face down with clenched hands in
the sea.
(Thrice the banshee cries in the stormy night.)

THE BANSHEE

Now God between us and all harm,
For I to-night have seen
A banshee in the shadow pass
Along the dark boreen.

And as she went she keened and cried
And combed her long white hair,
She stopped at Molly Reilly's door,
And sobbed till midnight there.

And is it for himself she moans,
Who is so far away ?
Or is it Molly Reilly's death
She cries until the day ?

Now Molly thinks her man is gone
A sailor lad to be ;
She puts a candle at her door
Each night for him to see.

THE BANSHEE

But he is off to Galway town,
 (And who dare tell her this?)
Enchanted by a woman's eyes,
 Half-maddened by her kiss.

So as we go by Molly's door
 We look towards the sea,
And say, ' May God bring home your lad,
 Wherever he may be.'

I pray it may be Molly's self
 The banshee keens and cries,
For who dare breathe the tale to her,
 Be it her man who dies ?

But there is sorrow on the way,
 For I to-night have seen
A banshee in the shadow pass
 Along the dark breen.

THE WIND ON THE HILLS

Go not to the hills of Erinn
When the night winds are about,
Put up your bar and shutter,
And so keep the danger out.

For the good-folk whirl within it,
And they pull you by the hand,
And they push you on the shoulder,
Till you move to their command.

And lo ! you have forgotten
What you have known of tears,
And you will not remember
That the world goes full of years ;

A year there is a lifetime,
And a second but a day,
And an older world will meet you
Each morn you come away.

THE WIND ON THE HILLS

Your wife grows old with weeping,
And your children one by one
Grow grey with nights of watching,
Before your dance is done.

And it will chauce some morning
You will come home no more ;
Your wife sees but a withered leaf
In the wind about the door.

And your children will inherit
The unrest of the wind,
They shall seek some face elusive,
And some land they never find.

When the wind is loud, they sighing
Go with hearts unsatisfied,
For some joy beyond remembrance,
For some memory denied.

And all your children's children,
They cannot sleep or rest,
When the wind is out in Erinn
And the sun is in the West.

ALL SOULS' EVE

I CRIED all night to you,
I called till day was here ;
Perhaps you could not come,
Or were too tired, dear.

Your chair I set by mine,
I made the dim hearth glow,
I whispered, ' When he comes
I shall not let him go.'

I closed the shutters tight,
I feared the dawn of day,
I stopped the busy clock
That timed your hours away.

Loud howled my neighbour's dog,
Oh glad was I to hear !
The dead are going by,
Now you will come, my dear,

To take the chair by mine—
Until the cock do crow—

ALL SOULS' EVE

Oh, if it be you came
And could not let me know !

For once a shadow passed
Behind me in the room,
I thought your loving eyes
Would meet mine in the gloom.

And once I thought I heard
A footstep by my chair,
I raised my eager hands,
But no sweet ghost was there.

We were too wide apart—
You in your spirit land—
I knew not when you came,
I could not understand.

Your eyes perhaps met mine,
Reproached me through the gloom,
Alas, for me alone
The empty, empty room !

The dead were passing home,
The cock crew loud and clear,
Mavourneen, if you came,
I knew not you were here.

THE MOUNTAIN MAID

HALF seated on a mossy crag,
Half crouching in the heather ;
I found a little Irish maid,
All in June's golden weather.

Like some fond hand that loved the child,
The wind tossed back her tresses ;
The heath-bells touched her unclad feet
With shy and soft caresses.

A mountain linnet flung his song
Into the air around her ;
But all in vain the splendid hour,
For deep in woe I found her.

'Ahone ! Ahone ! Ahone !' she wept,
'The tears fell fast and faster ;
I sat myself beside her there,
To hear of her disaster.

THE MOUNTAIN MAID

Like dew on roses down her cheek
The diamond drops were stealing ;
She laid her two brown hands in mine,
Her trouble all revealing

Alas ! Alas ! the tale she told
In Gaelic low and tender ;
A plague upon my Saxon tongue,
I could not comprehend her.

THE FAIRIES

THE fairies, the fairies, the mischief-loving
fairies,
Have stolen my loved one, my darling, and
my dear ;
With charms and enchantments they lured
and waylaid him,
So my love cannot comfort and my presence
cannot cheer.

The fairies, the fairies, I 'll love no more the
fairies ;
I 'll never sweep the hearth for them or care
the fairy thorn,
I 'll skim no more the yellow cream nor leave
the perfumed honey ;
But I 'll drive the goats for pasture to their
greenest rath each morn.

THE FAIRIES

With Ave, and Ave, and many a Paternoster,
Within their magic circle I'll tell my beads
for you ;
My prayers be sharp as arrows to pierce their
soulless bosoms
Till they come with loud sorrow to tell me
that they rue.

My darling, my darling, what glamour is upon
you
That you find for your gaze satisfaction
and content
In the charms of that colleen, with her black
snaky ringlets,
Her red lips contemptuous, and her gloomy
brows so bent ?

The fairies, the fairies, from her blue eyes
were peeping ;
They blew her hair about you so you were
lost, my dear.
With their charms and enchantments they
lured and waylaid you,
So my love cannot comfort and my presence
cannot cheer.

THE MAN WHO TROD ON
SLEEPING GRASS

IN a field by Cahirconlish
I stood on sleeping grass,
No cry I made to heaven
From my dumb lips would pass.

Three days, three nights I slumbered,
And till I woke again
Those I have loved have sought me,
And sorrowed all in vain.

My neighbours still upbraid me,
And murmur as I pass,
'There goes a man enchanted,
He trod on fairy grass.'

My little ones around me,
They claim my old caress,
I push them roughly from me
With hands that cannot bless.

MAN WHO TROD ON SLEEPING GRASS

My wife upon my shoulder
A bitter tear lets fall,
I turn away in anger
And love her not at all.

For like a man surrounded,
In some sun-haunted lane,
By countless wings that follow,
A grey and stinging chain,

Around my head for ever
I hear small voices speak
In tongues I cannot follow,
I know not what they seek.

I raise my hands to find them
When autumn winds go by,
And see between my fingers
A broken summer fly.

I raise my hands to hold them
When winter days are near,
And clasp a falling snowflake
That breaks into a tear.

MAN WHO TROD ON SLEEPING GRASS

And ever follows laughter
That echoes through my heart,
From some delights forgotten
Where once I had a part.

What love comes half-remembered,
In half-forgotten bliss ?
Who lay upon my bosom,
And had no human kiss ?

Where is the land I loved in ?
What music did I sing
That left my ears enchanted
Inside the fairy ring ?

I see my neighbours shudder,
And whisper as I pass :
' Three nights the fairies stole him ;
He trod on sleeping grass.'

CEAN DUV DEELISH

CEAN duv deelish, beside the sea
I stand and stretch my hands to thee
 Across the world.

The riderless horses race to shore
With thundering hoofs and shuddering, hoar,
 Blown manes uncurled.

Cean duv deelish, I cry to thee
Beyond the world, beneath the sea,
 Thou being dead.
Where hast thou hidden from the beat
Of crushing hoofs and tearing feet
 Thy dear black head?

Cean duv deelish, 'tis hard to pray
With breaking heart from day to day,
 And no reply ;
When the passionate challenge of sky is cast
In the teeth of the sea and an angry blast
 Goes keening by.

CEAN DUV DEELISH

God bless the woman, whoever she be,
From the tossing waves will recover thee
 And lashing wind.

Who will take thee out of the wind and storm,
Dry thy wet face on her bosom warm
 And lips so kind ?

I not to know. It is hard to pray,
But I shall for this woman from day to day,
 ' Comfort my dead,
The sport of the winds and the play of the sea.'
I loved thee too well for this thing to be,
 O dear black head !

THE YOUTH BEWITCHED

My fair-haired boy is sore bewitched,
He goes all full of grieving ;
'The web of gloom upon his brow
Is sure of fairy weaving.

His cheery laugh I never hear,
His voice is rough and chiding ;
Upon his path some evil thing
Does watch him from its hiding.

Ah ! Ah ! I bid him tell
If he has trod unknowing
Upon the fairy sleeping grass
Or cut the thorn a-growing.

He only turns his head away,
His words are bitter hearing ;
But, ah ! he cannot silence so
A mother's heart from fearing.

THE YOUTH BEWITCHED

Last night I made a waxen shape
To bring the witch before me,
So she could take the sullen lad,
And my bright child restore me.

Nine pins I thrust within its side
To pierce her heart to dying,
And laid it on the glowing turf,
So listened for her crying.

Soon pressed a hand upon the latch,
I feared the evil fairy ;
But when I raised my frightened eyes
'Twas none but Dwyer's Mary.

I told her of the boy bewitched,
She listened unbelieving ;
And said she knew to-morrow's eve
Would free him of his grieving.

She turned her blushing face aside,
Her voice was low and cheering ;
But, ah ! she cannot silence so
A mother's heart from fearing.

AN IRISH BLACKBIRD

This is my brave singer,
With his beak of gold ;
Now my heart 's a captive
In his song's sweet hold.

Oh, the lark's a rover,
Seeking fields above :
But my serenader
Hath a human love.

' Hark ! ' he says, ' in winter
Nests are full of snow,
But a truce to wailing,
Summer breezes blow.'

' Hush ! ' he sings, ' with night-time
Phantoms cease to be,
Join your serenader
Piping on his tree.'

AN IRISH BLACKBIRD

Oh, my little lover,
Warble in the blue ;
Wingless must I envy
Skies so wide for you.

THE FAIRY CHANGELING

BRIAN O'BYRNE of Omah town
In his garden strode up and down ;
He pulled his beard, and he beat his breast ;
And this is his trouble and woe confessed :

' The good folk came in the night, and they
Have stolen my bonny wean away ;
Have put in his place a changeling,
A weashy, weakly, wizen thing !

' From the speckled hen nine eggs I stole,
And lighting a fire of a glowing coal,
I fried the shells, and I split the yolk ;
But never a word the stranger spoke.

' A bar of metal I heated red
To frighten the fairy from its bed,
To put in the place of this fretting wean
My own bright beautiful boy again.

THE FAIRY CHANGELING

' But my wife had hidden it in her arms,
And cried " For shame ! " on my fairy charms ;
She sobs, with the strange child on her breast :
" I love the weak, wee babe the best ! " '

To Brian O'Byrne's, the tale to hear,
The neighbours came from far and near :
Outside his gate, in the long boreen,
They crossed themselves, and said between

Their muttered prayers, ' He has no luck !
For sure the woman is fairy-struck,
To leave her child a fairy guest,
And love the weak, wee wean the best ! '

THE FAIR LITTLE MAIDEN

‘ THERE is one at the door, Wolfe O’Driscoll,
At the door, who bids you to come ! ’
’ Who is he that wakes me in the darkness,
Calling when all the world is dumb ? ’

‘ Six horses has he to his carriage,
Six horses blacker than the night,
And their twelve red eyes in the shadows—
Twelve lamps he carries for his light ;

‘ His coach is a herse black and mouldy,
Within a coffin open wide :
He asks for your soul, Wolfe O’Driscoll,
Who doth call at the door outside.’

‘ Who let him through the gates of my gardens,
Where stronger bolts have never been ? ’
‘ The father of the fair little maiden
You drove to her grave deep and green.’

THE FAIR LITTLE MAIDEN

‘ And who let him pass through the courtyard,
Loosening the bar and the chain ? ’

‘ Who but the brother of the maiden
Who lies in the cold and the rain ! ’

‘ Then who drew the bolts at the portal,
And into my house bade him go ? ’

‘ The mother of the poor young maiden
Who lies in her youth all so low.’

‘ Who stands, that he dare not enter,
The door of my chamber, between ? ’

‘ Oh, the ghost of the fair little maiden
Who lies in the churchyard green.’

LITTLE WHITE ROSE

LITTLE white rose that I loved, I loved,
Roisin ban, Roisin ban !

Fair my bud as the morning's dawn.
I kissed my beautiful flower to bloom,
My heart grew glad for its rich perfume—
Little white rose that I loved !

Little white rose that I loved grew red,
Roisin rua, Roisin rua !
Passionate tears I wept for you.
Love is more sweet than the world's fame—
I dream you back in my heart the same,
Little white rose that I loved !

Little white rose that I loved grew black,
Roisin duv, Roisin duv !
So I knew not the heart of you.
Lost in the world's alluring fire,
I cry in the night for my heart's desire,
Little white rose that I loved !

SPRING SONG : TO IRELAND

WEEP no more, heart of my heart, no more !
The night has passed and the dawn is here,
The cuckoo calls from the budding trees,
And tells us that Spring is near.

Sorrow no more, beloved, no more !
For see, sweet emblem of hope untold,
The tears that soft on the shamrocks fall
There turn to blossoms of gold.

Winter has gone with its blighting breath,
No more to chill thee with cold or fear,
The brook laughs loud in its liberty,
Green buds on the hedge appear.

Weep no more, life of my heart, no more !
The birds are carolling sweet and clear ;
The warmth of Summer is in the breeze,
And the Spring—the Spring is here

THE KINE OF MY FATHER

THE kine of my father, they are straying from
my keeping ;

The young goat 's at mischief, but little can
I do :

For all through the night did I hear the banshee
keening ;

O youth of my loving, and is it well with
you ?

All through the night sat my mother with my
sorrow ;

' Whisht, it is the storm, O one childeen of
my heart ! '

My hair with the wind, and my two hands
clasped in anguish ;

Black head of my darling ! too long are we
apart.

THE KINE OF MY FATHER

Were your grave at my feet, I would think it
half a blessing ;

I could herd then the cattle, and drive the
goats away ;

Many a Paternoster I would say for your safe
keeping ;

I could sleep above your heart until the
dawn of day.

I see you on the prairie, hot with thirst and
faint with hunger ;

The head that I love lying low upon the sand.

The vultures shriek impatient, and the coyote
dogs are howling,

Till the blood is pulsing cold within your
clenching hand.

I see you on the waters, so white, so still,
forsaken,

Your dear eyes unclosing beneath a foreign
rain ;

A plaything of the winds, you turn and drift
unceasing,

No grave for your resting ; oh mine the
bitter pain !

THE KINE OF MY FATHER

All through the night did I hear the banshee
keening :

Somewhere you are dying, and nothing can
I do ;

My hair with the wind, and my two hands
clasped in anguish ;

Bitter is your trouble—and I am far from
you.

THE ROAD TO CABINTEELY

OH, the lonely road, the road to Cabinteely !
'Tis there I see a little ghost, and gaily
singeth she.
She plucks the swaying cowslip nor stays for
all my calling,
But flies at my pursuing, who once did run
to me.
She once did run to me.

I follow, ever eager, the dancing shade elusive,
The phantom feet that leave me so lone and
far behind.
'Then comes her merry laughter, like elfin music
chiming,
She cares not for my sorrow, she once to
grief so kind,
She was to tears so kind.

THE ROAD TO CABINTEELY

Her kiss falls swift and tender on breaking
bud and blossom,
Her flitting fingers touch them, fair as white
butterflies,
Her slender arms enfold them with soft and
sweet embraces,
Remembered shy caresses she now to me
denies,
She all to me denies.

On the haunted road, the road to Cabinteely,
'Tis there a little dancing ghost her merry
way doth take.
She sings no song of sorrow, nor knows no
pain of weeping.
I would not wish her home again, though
my lone heart should break,
Though my poor heart should
break.

THE FAIRY THORN-TREE

' THIS is an evil night to go, my sister,
To the thorn-tree across the fairy rath,
Will you not wait till Hallow Eve is over?
For many are the dangers in your path !'

' I may not wait till Hallow Eve is over,
I shall be there before the night is fled,
For, brother, I am weary for my lover,
And I must see him once, alive or dead.

' I 've prayed to heaven, but it would not listen,
I 'll call thrice in the devil's name to-night,
Be it a live man that shall come to hear me,
Or but a corpse, all clad in snowy white.'

.
She had drawn on her silken hose and garter,
Her crimson petticoat was kilted high,
She trod her way amid the bog and brambles,
Until the fairy-tree she stood near-by.

THE FAIRY THORN-TREE

When first she cried the evil name so loudly
She listened, but she heard no sound at all ;
When twice she cried, she thought from out
the darkness
She heard the echo of a light footfall.

When last she cried her voice came in a
whisper,
She trembled in her loneliness and fright ;
Before her stood a shrouded, mighty figure,
In sombre garments blacker than the night.

‘ And if you be my own true love,’ she ques-
tioned,
‘ I fear you ! Speak you quickly unto me.’
‘ *Oh, I am not your own true love,*’ it answered,
‘ *He drifts without a grave upon the sea.*’

‘ If he be dead, then gladly will I follow
Down the black stairs of death into the
grave.’
‘ *Your lover calls you for a place to rest him
From the eternal tossing of the wave.*’

THE FAIRY THORN-TREE

‘ I’ll make my love a bed both wide and hollow,

A grave wherein we both may ever sleep.’

‘ *What give you for his body fair and slender,
To draw it from the dangers of the deep?* ’

‘ I’ll give you both my silver comb and earrings,

‘ I’ll give you all my little treasure store.’

‘ *I will but take what living thing comes forward,
The first to meet you, passing to your door.* ’

‘ Oh may my little dog be first to meet me,
So loose my lover from your dreaded hold.’

‘ *What will you give me for the heart that loved
you,
The heart that I hold chained and frozen cold?* ’

‘ My own betrothed ring I give you gladly,
My ring of pearls—and every one a tear!’

‘ *I will but have what living creature follows
The first that on your pathway shall
appear.* ’

THE FAIRY THORN-TREE

‘ To buy this heart, to warm my love to living,
I pray my pony meet me on return.’
*‘And for his pure young soul what will you give
me,
His soul that night and day doth fret and
burn?’*

‘ You will not have my silver comb and ear-
rings,
You will not have my ring of precious stone ;
Oh, nothing have I left to promise to you,
But give my soul to buy him back his own.’

All woefully she wept, and stepping homeward,
Bemoaned aloud her dark and cruel fate ;
‘ Oh, come,’ she cried, ‘ my little dog to meet
me,
And you, my horse, be browsing at the gate.’

Right hastily she pushed by bush and bramble,
Chased by a fear that made her footsteps
fleet,
And as she ran she met her little brother,
Then her old father coming her to meet.

THE FAIRY THORN-TREE

'O brother, little brother,' cried she, weeping,
'Well you said of fairy-tree beware,
For precious things are bought and sold ere
midnight,
On Hallow Eve, by those who barter there.'

She went alone into the little chapel,
And knelt before the holy virgin's shrine,
She wept, 'O Mother Mary, pray you for me,
To save those two most gentle souls of thine.'

And as she prayed, behold the holy statue
Spoke to her, saying, 'Little can I aid,
God's ways are just, and you have dared to
question
His judgment on this soul; you bought—
and paid.'

'For that one soul, your father and your
brother,
Your own immortal life you bartered; then,
Yet one chance is allowed—your sure repent-
ance,
Give back his heart you made to live again.'

THE FAIRY THORN-TREE

‘ For these two souls—my father and my
brother—

I give his heart back into death’s cold land,
Never again to warm his dead, sweet body,
Or beat to madness underneath my hand.’

‘ And for your soul—to save it from its sorrow,
You must drive back his soul into the night,
Back into righteous punishment and justice,
Or lose your chance of everlasting light.’

‘ Oh, never shall I drive him back to anguish,
My soul shall suffer, letting his go free.’
She rose, and weeping, left the little chapel,
Went forward blindly till she reached the sea.

She dug a grave within the surf and shingle,
A dark, cold bed, made very deep and wide,
She laid her down all stiff and stretched for
burial,
Right in the pathway of the rising tide.

THE FAIRY THORN-TREE

First tossed into her waiting arms the restless
Loud waves, a woman very grey and cold,
Within her bed she stood upright so quickly,
And loosed her fingers from the dead hands'
hold.

The second who upon her heart had rested
From out the storm, a baby chill and stark,
With one long sob she drew it on her bosom,
Then thrust it out again into the dark.

The last who came so slow was her own lover ;
She kissed his icy face on cheek and chin,
' Oh cold shall be your house to-night, beloved,
Oh cold the bed that we must sleep within.

' And heavy, heavy, on our lips so faithful
And on our hearts, shall lie our own roof-
tree.'

And as she spoke the bitter tears were falling
On his still face, all salter than the sea.

THE FAIRY THORN-TREE

'And oh,' she said, 'if for a little moment
You knew, my cold, dead love, that I was by,
That my soul goes into the utter darkness
When yours comes forth—and mine goes in
to die.'

And as she wept she kissed his frozen forehead,
Laid her warm lips upon his mouth so chill,
With no response—and then the waters flowing
Into their grave, grew heavy, deep, and still.

.

And so, 'tis said, if to that fairy thorn-tree
You dare to go, you see her ghost so lone,
She prays for love of her that you will aid her,
And give your soul to buy her back her own.

MY LADY'S SLIPPER

A TRUE STORY

I

I AM a man who hath known trouble,
O'Ruark of the Lake.
On my life's glass joy rose as a bubble
To glitter and break.

She laid in mine her hands long and slender,
So softly sweet,
Little curls on her head tasselled like tender
Gold autumn wheat.

Brown leaves around her whirling and falling
Blown to her cheek,
I, with my heart for her loud in its calling,
Still could not speak!

MY LADY'S SLIPPER

Wife of my foe thus pleading before me,
 There seemed no wrong :
With my mad passions that stifled and tore me
 Who could be strong ?

What had she shown me there in her weeping,
 On her white arm ?
Black, cruel bruises vividly keeping
 Tales of alarm.

What had she begged me there in the morning,
 God judge me well ?
What had she said, that I without warning
 Struggled in Hell ?

‘ Take me and save me, be my defender,
 Hide me away.’
She from my old foe bid me befriend her,
 How could I stay ?

Here was revenge for the old bitter wronging,
 Here to my hand ;
Here was the love of my life—of my longing,
 Could I withstand ?

MY LADY'S SLIPPER

Thrice did I turn to fly from my danger,
 God judge me true,
Vowed that my love to her love was a
 stranger,
 This did I do.

But when I looked on her, heard her calling,
 Kneeling so low,
There the sun's sheen on golden locks falling,
 How could I go?

' Dearly beloved, shaken with sorrow,
 Branded with blows,
Which way does honour lie? think! for to-
 morrow
 Only God knows!'

One man should use her so: he in whose
 keeping
 Broken she lay;
One man should love her so, see her there
 weeping,
 And turn away.

MY LADY'S SLIPPER

He were inhuman. Riding behind me
Home did she speed.
Which way did honour lie? Love did so
blind me,
Great was her need.

There at my door did I linger awhile
Tending my horse,
Saw her flit up the long steps, and her smile
Bore no remorse.

On her pale brow was a look of soft peace,
Upward she went ;
Never a glance in her welcome release
Backward she bent.

Red was her cloak, and her face like a flower
Dear to behold ;
Little red slippers she wore in that hour
Buckled with gold.

Up the white steps like a flash of red flame,
In through the door ;
Quick did I follow to tremble her name—
Saw her no more.

MY LADY'S SLIPPER

Saw her no more from that hour—she had gone,
Vanished away,
Like a bright light on my lone path that shone,
Then let me stray.

II

I had a neighbour—he was my friend,
Since in the wood
Lone our two houses were, each gable-end
United stood.

This was a manor once built for a knight
In days of old,
But with the centuries love and their fight
Squandered the gold.

So for my friend, when inheritance came
Coffers were bare,
Just the old keep and the weight of a name,
This was his share.

Then he divided the house into two—
I took a part.
Now in my grief for his guidance I flew,
Knowing his heart.

MY LADY'S SLIPPER

' At dawn he departed,' the little page said—
Time without end.
Oh, on what broken wings laggard hours fled !
He was my friend.

So the years passed me and shed in their flight
Dust and decay ;
Ruin and rust on the old manor clings,
Crumbling away.

Only my desolate chambers remain,
Racked by the wind ;
All down the years go I seeking in vain—
Never to find.

Vanished my love—my friend—not a cry !
Leaving life's race,
Like the bright meteors that slip in the sky,
Leap into space.

III

The shadows are long, I crouch by the fire,
Bitter with years,
See all the shades of my former desire
Ghostly through tears.

MY LADY'S SLIPPER

Down the long hall to me, weary of play,
Comes my young hound ;
At my feet, tumbled, his dusty toy lay—
What had he found ?

There in the firelight glitter of gold,
God make me strong !
A little red slipper I tremulous hold,
Lost for so long.

So musty and faded, mouldy with years,
Where hidden and how ?
Here, after searching, much passion and tears,
Come to me now.

' What is in hiding ? Oh, track me the way—
Find her, my hound !'
Up the steep stairs he goes, eager for play,
Gambolling around.

Up to the turret room, close to the wall,
Barking he goes ;
Tears till the wainscoting crumbling falls
Under his blows.

MY LADY'S SLIPPER

Rotten with age, here a panel unseen
Slips 'neath my hand ;
Into the silence of love that has been,
I shuddering stand.

This is the secret hidden away,
Built in the wall—
Between the two houses a room cold and gray,
Gloomy and small.

Huddled and crumbling, stretched on the
ground,
Mould and decay ;
Dust to dust mingled, the secret is found,
So here they lay.

In one embrace down the desolate years
Over my head
Did they lie smiling and know of my tears,
Cruel and dead.

Here the grey spider had circled them o'er,
Hand to hand tied,
In their clasped fingers lay hidden his store,
There, too, he spied.

MY LADY'S SLIPPER

I was the fool then who linked in that clasp
Each skeleton hand ;
Thus !—will I be he who loosens the grasp,
How was it planned ?

Here is a phial : was death then so sweet,
Honour or life ?
This was the only way lovers could meet—
She was a wife.

Wrapped in death's silence, safe from my scorn ;
He was my friend :
It was *his* love whom I bore home that morn,
His to the end !

Was it the woman who plotted and spied,
Using my heart
Just for a stone there to step where the tide
Kept them apart ?

Was he a coward, lying lowly to wait,
Giving me blame ?
Vain do I strike him avenging my fate.
Cursed be his name !

MY LADY'S SLIPPER

She was my love : did she bid him believe
I for his sake
Cast away honour to stoop and deceive,
Bore *him* the stake ?

He was my friend : dare I doubt him and know
What if it be
Nothing he knew of her coming—the blow
That fell on me ?

Knowing his honour, it might be she came,
Since he was still.
What did she care for my torture or shame ?—
I served her will.

Knowing his weakness under her eyes,
Boldly she flew
Into his arms, hushed his blame and surprise,
If this be true.

Speak to me once, for God's sake, till I know
What was the worst !
My friend, my beloved, did you both plan the
blow
Made me accurst ?

MY LADY'S SLIPPER

Speak to me once, O dear voices, for I
 Wait to forgive !
Tell me your secret : the echoes reply—
 I alone live.

.

Only the bark of my dog in the tower,
 Glad in his play ;
• Red was her cloak, and her face like a flower ' ;
 Hide it away !

THE BARD OF BREFFNEY

WITHERED with years and broken by Time's
play

I still do live, who only seek to lay
My harp aside and my white head to rest
On the safe shelter of the earth's soft breast.
There o'er me spread her coverlet of green,
And let me bide as though I ne'er had been.
I am the bard of Breffney, and I keep
A vigil still while all I loved doth sleep :
And sorrow cometh with the passing years.
Much have I sung of laughter, much of tears.
Hate have I seen, and anger, love, despair,
Now am I captive in the net of care.

Proud of my race, of Erin have I sung
With my sweet harp while yet my heart was
young.

Oh, isle of Kings, how lowly did she come,
My song triumphant shook and trembled
dumb.

THE BARD OF BREFFNEY

Bride of the waters, she who knew no chain,
From her fair shores she drove the nomad Dane,
And Norsemen fierce who dared her power
 offend,
Then she, betrayed by one who was her
 friend,
Quaked 'neath the Norman foot, that down the
 years
Shall tread its way through useless blood and
 tears.

And when at last, of all her glories shorn,
She lies in chains a captive all forlorn,
She shall arise, and crying in her shame,
Curse that false son who bore MacMurrough's
 name ;

As I do now who go toward the grave,
And have my sad immortal soul to save.
Yea ! do I pray destruction swift and sure
On Dermot's race. He did with guile secure
The Saxon foe to come upon her shore ;
Whose iron grasp shall lose her never more.
And I shall curse a woman's wayward heart,
Who in some wanton hour did all depart

THE BARD OF BREFFNEY

From virtue's way, and with MacMurrough sped.
So in the winds her husband's honour shed,
As thou Dearbhorgil, who in thy disgrace
Hath shamed the glories of an ancient race.

O cursèd day within the pregnant year,
When first this tale did so distress my ear,
And Red O'Ruark hath from his fasting
 come
From some far shrine. I stood to meet him,
 dumb
Within his hall, when crying on her name,
He held her not, and understood her shame.
White did he grow who still was faint with
 prayer,
And turned aside to hide his chill despair.
And when he went into the banquet spread
For his gay friends, slow was his heavy tread
As one who bears a burden to his place,
Yet to his guests he held a smiling face.
And when they saw Dearbhorgil's empty chair,
Calling their eyes to note the absence there,
Of her who should upon the feast have smiled,
With easy jest their humour they beguiled,

THE BARD OF BREFFNEY

In guessing where she hid and why she stayed.
With their gay wit they did O'Ruark upbraid,
'She loves thee not to leave thee thus alone,'
Or 'To what cage has this sweet birdling
flown?'

And I did glance, in pity at his need,
On his white face whose stillness so did plead
For their forbearance, but they, gay with wine,
Strove each in jest the other to outshine.
Then did O'Ruark find chorus for their tune
With oft a smile, but sorrow held him soon,
So he spoke not in her defence again,
But sat as one whose very heart was slain,
And through his teeth drew in the sighing
breath,

As some proud bull sore stricken to his death
Pants in the ring to fall and fight no more,
Yet still doth face the knife his vitals tore,
He sighed and leant his chin upon his breast
In silence 'neath the daggers of their jest.
Then down his cheek a great tear surely fell,
Wrung from despair, their merriment to quell,
Calling to us have pity, and for shame.
This noble sorrow gave the greater blame.
And as he sat in silence each light laugh
Dropped into peace, and each wit-pointed shaft

THE BARD OF BREFFNEY

Fell aimless, as an arrow sloping flies
To pierce some wretched beast that lifeless
lies.

And so each hunter of immortal jest,
Stayed by this stillness, all shamed in his quest,
Fell half to anger for his humour chilled,
Till one arose, with all his laughter killed,
To gaze into the eyes of his sad chief,
And read that face so pale with wordless grief.
And his low cry drew all upon their feet
To learn the tragic tale he did repeat.

Dearbhorgil gone! the jest was then too true.
Throughout the hall the horrid scandal flew,
And from the door sent forth her fateful cry,
So all did hear who passed the threshold by.
The maids, who ran swift-footed through the
place,

In hurried whispers spread the dark disgrace.
The agèd cook, who slept beside the fire,
And woke to grumble at his work in ire,
Then fell to sleep again, till he did hear
This noisy tale that did awake his ear.
Then quick he rose to pass the story on
To wondering youths who hung his words upon,
And one, who fed the hounds, away did creep
To some far stable to lament and weep

THE BARD OF BREFFNEY

Dearbhorgil gone. For he did love her well,
And feared for her who wove the wanton spell.
Did not O'Ruark guess at her faithless heart,
When to that shrine he praying did depart,
Or was it for her love he there did plead?
For some still say that rumour long had freed
Her evil net to noose him in its snare
Of fierce suspicion and of jealous care.
If so it be, in silence he did shed
His bitter tears, for lone his brave heart bled,
As some great ox fly-driven meek doth go,
All powerless to assault his tiny foe,
Where hath a greater fallen 'neath his rage.
But when O'Ruark, uplifted from amaze,
Knew for his foe no woman's fickleness
But found a king, his fate he did confess
And swore to vengeance, as did every man
Who faced him there. So swift the story ran
To Conor's Court, the king of all the land,
To join O'Ruark and have MacMurrough banned.
And the red torch of war, that each man lit
From Red O'Ruark's hot vengeance, soon did
flit

About the restless Isle, made prostitute
By Murrough's shame. He flew at our pursuit
To call on Saxon aid, and did return

THE BARD OF BREFFNEY

To light dissension's flame, that still doth burn.
Nor shall it die in ages still to come,
When my sad singing is for ever dumb.
Dumb as the traitor lips of Murrough are,
And brave O'Ruark's who perished in red war.
And I, who fought beside him as he fell,
Raised my young arm the deathblow to repel,
Now in my chair sit angry with the years
That bring to my dim eyes the shame of
tears,

That bind me helpless with the bonds of time,
Freeze my hot blood with winter's frosty rime,
And mem'ry, like a stone cast in a lake,
Doth by its wound a thousand circles wake
Of griefs all hope forgotten, and of days
I'll live no more. For I in dim amaze
Find myself captive to Time's powerful net.
A prisoner I, who never vanquished yet
By nobler foe, else I myself had slain,
Here lie a captive to a victor's chain.
This feeble arm, once ready in the fray,
I scarce can raise to brush the gnats away.
These feet so quick to reach the flying foe,
From couch to fire now hesitate to go.
And went my heart, unshaken through the
tears

THE BARD OF BREFFNEY

Of those my enemies enslaved by fears,
As clove my ship through stress of storm and
rain.

This heart, that ne'er shall beat with youth
again,

Calls out in weeping, 'Pity, I implore,
Let time destroy as he cannot restore.'

There at the gate the steeds champ for the
race,

The great hounds yawn in waiting for the
chase.

And my son's son, impatient to be free,
Walks by the creeping feet of age with me,
And twists his restless body 'neath my hand,
Eager to flee his grandsire's weak command.
And comes my son to say, 'Canst thou not
rest ?

Thou art but feeble to endure this quest,
To see us speed in passing through the gate,
Lie in thy chair, my son on thee shall wait.'
And as he goes the easy tears of age
Flow down my cheek and end my useless
rage,

THE BARD OF BREFFNEY

For my soul, angry with the years, drops now
Her last poor weapon, and her neck doth bow
Beneath the heavy foot of Time, and falls
A prey to this great victor who enthral
Her cries to silence, so she doth but creep
To nod beside the fire content to sleep.
For I have been sore wasted in the fray,
And, fallen to dishonour and dismay,
Have given up the battle to my shame.
Old, I am old, nigh done with life's brief flame.

Son of my son, do thou my last request
So I may sleep untroubled in my rest.
Let free the captive hawks, the wolf release
From his caged comfort, that shall bring no
 peace
To his wild heart. 'Tis good to see them go
Through the sweet air, so they may never know
The grief of age, but die in some fierce fight
That makes e'en death a glory and delight.
And run thee, child, fleet as thy foot can go,
Far from this feeble age that mocks thee so.
Crying, so shalt thou be who now art young,
Such was he once who sits the shades among.

THE BARD OF BREFFNEY

Here let me sleep the restless sleep of age,
Who would have slept more sound where
 battles rage
Sung in my dying ears its lullaby
Upon the field where brave O'Ruark did die.

WHAT POETS HAVE SAID OF DORA SIGERSON'S POETRY

GEORGE MEREDITH

'Her little book made me a juvenile, finding the eternal poet in that wise creature. . . . She is one of the few who can tell a tale in verse.'
—*Correspondence*, Vol. II.

A. C. SWINBURNE

'"The Beggar Maid" gives me infinite pleasure. I thank you for Miss Dora Sigerson's beautiful book.'—*Correspondence*.

FRANCIS THOMPSON

'In this volume her ballads seem often to touch a deeper and more poignant feeling . . . the unconsciousness of the child, contrasted with the sorrow of its earthly lot—this is a familiar theme, yet Miss Sigerson handles it with unfamiliar freshness and power. . . . This volume extends our idea of her power.'—*The Academy*, January 16, 1904.

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON

'I think "Madge Linsey" one of the best poems that has come from Miss Sigerson's pen. She has the rare poetic quality of *naïveté*, a quality which almost no modern poet, except Coleridge, has secured.'
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